

OP-EDS

THE GHOST OF THE MOTHER OF TRUSTS

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The architecture of Columbia University towers over its students and faculty but not their individual initiative. Public domain.

The 94th Academy Awards ceremony on March 27 saw misunderstanding erupt into an acrimonious conflict: The battle of the ghosts of Reitman, Reagan, Ramis, and Roosevelt.

Bill Murray paid tribute to the memory of *Ghostbusters* director Ivan Reitman, while the Academy also marked the 15th anniversary of Jason Reitman's *Juno*. The junior Reitman recently directed a *Ghostbusters* sequel in which generations joined forces to commemorate Murray's departed fellow Ghostbuster Harold Ramis.

Meanwhile, four Oscar nominations yielded zero wins for *Don't Look Up*, in which the world is endangered rather than saved by private enterprise out-muscling the state during a crisis. The parallels between its villains and the Ghostbusters is no coincidence, since co-writer David Sirota's book *Back to Our Future* is admittedly inspired by what the Bernie Sanders speechwriter considers a nefarious undermining of trust in government by such 1980s heroes.

Sirota views American popular culture as so dominated by Reagan-era renegades that citizens are blinded to the beneficence of public service. Yet partisans on both sides of the aisle were happy to seize on the iconography of “busting” ever since *Ghostbusters* ruled the 1984 box office. That year’s presidential election featured dueling “Fritzbusters” and “Reaganbusters” takeoffs on the iconic anti-ghost logo. Each advocated the other candidate as a substitute rather than a downsizing of the presidential power available to either.

Ghostbusters imagery has even been retrofitted to previous administrations, with the 1990s educational TV show *Histeria!* providing trustbuster Theodore Roosevelt with an off-brand proton pack to blast corporate piggery. The overpowering of Main Street by Wall Street is treated as a natural result of market consolidation, as if Reagan’s chimpanzee costar Bonzo matured into King Kong.

Gabriel Kolko observed that the Progressive Era was in fact marked by “intense and growing competition” outpacing the “economic expansion and ... greater internal concentration of capital” of the largest companies, whose owners welcomed regulation burdening smaller upstarts more than themselves. Free traders of the time called protectionist policy that sheltered domestic firms from foreign competitors “the mother of trusts.”

Kolko led a generation of historians to rediscover how supposed archenemies big business and big government actively encouraged the development of each other, as if *Beowulf* monsters Grendel and Grendel’s mother reproduced in a continuous chicken-and-egg cycle. Severing the apron strings that connect the two would cut both Walter Peck-style bureaucracy and Gordon Gekko-style plutocracy down to size.

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1. “The ghost of the mother of trusts” by Joel Schlosberg, Miles City, *Montana Star*, March 31, 2022
2. “The Ghost of the Mother of Trusts” by Joel Schlosberg, CounterPunch, April 1, 2022
3. “The ghost of the mother of trusts” by Joel Schlosberg, *The Daily Star* [Hammond, Louisiana], April 2, 2022
4. “The Ghost Of The Mother Of Trusts” by Joel Schlosberg, Ventura County, California *Citizens Journal*, April 2, 2022